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FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9142  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000783

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STATE FOR P/M (ROBINSON) AND NEA/ARP, NSC FOR RAMCHAND, OSD  
FOR PALMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2022

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PARM](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: KUWAIT SCENESETTER FOR MAY 22 GULF SECURITY  
DIALOGUE

REF: A. 06 STATE 180168

- [1](#)B. KUWAIT 729
- [1](#)C. KUWAIT 608
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- [1](#)J. 06 KUWAIT 4390

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) The second round of the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) with Kuwait will convene on May 22 in Kuwait City. The National Security Bureau (NSB), the Kuwaiti government body responsible for coordinating security policy, is organizing the May 22 meeting. In addition to NSB President Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd Al-Sabah, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Khaled Al-Jarallah, Kuwait Armed Forces Chief of Staff LTG Fahd Al-Amir, and Ministry of Interior Undersecretary LTG Nasser Al-Othman are expected to attend the meeting along with staff members. The discussions will follow up on the initiatives proposed under the six pillars outlined in the GSD non-paper (ref A) passed to the Kuwaitis last November (refs I and J). There may also be a separate meeting with Defense/Interior Minister Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah; the Foreign Minister will be in Washington.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Kuwait's leadership has expressed commitment to the GSD, but some officials have suggested the discussions be broadened to include a wider range of strategic issues. While there is merit to this suggestion, the GSD is not the best venue or set of interlocutors to conduct such discussions. We believe a focused, practical approach to a clearly-defined set of security issues, particularly Iran, makes more sense in this venue.

Growing Concern about Iran/Iraq  
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[1](#)3. (S/NF) While Kuwait's leadership remains hesitant to confront Iran publicly, the issue is on top of their security agenda, and reportedly dominated the informal GCC summit discussions in Riyadh on May 15. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister advised the Ambassador on May 16 that the GCC leaders agreed that their Foreign Ministers, Defense Ministers, and National Security Advisers would meet regularly to coordinate efforts against the possibility of conflict with Iran. (Comment: This is likely to include sharing of views about the possibility of internal problems

stemming from Shia populations.) No announcement will be made about this mechanism. FM Al-Sabah said that silence from Arab summits makes the Iranians more nervous than declarations. The Minister also asked for the U.S. view on the accuracy of the recent New York Times story on the acceleration of the Iranian nuclear program, based on the IAEA report. He found the report "very disturbing." Also on the mind of GCC leaders is the decision by the U.S. and Iran to consult in Baghdad. The Kuwaitis and others worry that these consultations play a role in cementing greater Iranian influence over the future of Iraq. The GSD team should be prepared to offer as much detail as possible on these topics.

¶4. (S/NF) Kuwaiti officials have been increasingly vocal in calling for Iranian compliance with recent UN Security Council Resolutions and, at the same time, in expressing their concerns about the possibility of a conflict between the U.S. and Iran. Recent local media reports have played up this likelihood and stoked Kuwaiti fears that such a conflict is imminent and inevitable (refs E and H). Responding to domestic pressure, the Ministers of Defense/Interior, Foreign Affairs, Health, Commerce and Industry, Information, and Electricity and Water briefed Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee May 9 on Kuwait's preparedness for a conflict between the U.S. and Iran. The government also recently formed a ministerial committee to review civilian emergency planning and address issues such as a possible disruption in Kuwait's food and medical supplies. In April, Parliament ratified a seven-year old "security cooperation agreement" with Iran focused primarily on combating drug trafficking and increasing law enforcement cooperation (ref D); a Kuwaiti delegation led by an undersecretary from the Ministry of Interior was recently in Iran to discuss implementation.

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Kuwaiti officials repeatedly stress the importance of resolving tensions with Iran peacefully, noting that Kuwait would be vulnerable to Iranian retaliation if the U.S. attacked Iran. However, many in Kuwait believe an attack on Iranian nuclear installations by the U.S. or Israel is inevitable, and pundits have even offered specific dates for such actions.

¶5. (S/NF) There is also mounting concern in Kuwait that sectarian violence in Iraq could threaten domestic security and social cohesion. While Kuwait's Shi'a minority - approximately 30% of the country's one million citizens - is well-integrated and generally moderate, there have been growing tensions between a small, but vocal minority of pro-Iran Shi'a and hardline Salafi Islamists in Kuwait (ref G). Despite its reservations about the sectarian nature of Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's government, Kuwait has strongly supported Iraq, both politically and economically, and encouraged other Gulf states to do the same. Al-Maliki visited Kuwait April 24 and stressed the importance of debt relief and Iraq's desire for "bridge building" based on Kuwait's close family and tribal ties to Iraq, and a common Arab identity (ref C). Kuwait has committed more than \$575 million in aid to Iraq; however, difficulties in identifying implementers on the Iraqi side and ineffective prioritizing on the part of the Iraqi government have delayed disbursement. In late-2006, the two countries held talks on border and security issues and agreed to a joint mechanism to address border security incidents and maritime border protocol issues.

#### Heightened Security Awareness

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¶6. (S/NF) Regional tensions and the recent Saudi terror arrests have heightened Kuwait's security awareness. As a result, the GOK has adopted a more vigorous, public defense posture in recent months (ref F): Kuwait held its first military parade in more than 25 years, approved the deployment of two U.S. Patriot missile batteries at the main

U.S. military base in Kuwait, and hosted two separate USG teams to assess the country's Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection (CEIP) regime. The Ambassador met this week with the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Oil and Defense/Interior to deliver the final report of the assessment teams, which highlights significant gaps in Kuwait's infrastructure security. All expressed a commitment to continued cooperation to implement the reports' recommendations and to strengthen Kuwaiti security. The Saudi arrests may also spur the GOK to be more proactive in monitoring Kuwait-based charity organizations to ensure funds are not diverted to support terrorist activities (ref B).

#### Domestic Politics Hindering Action

17. (S/NF) Kuwait's effectiveness in acting on these issues will continue to be limited by domestic politics. Kuwait's unique political system gives Parliament a more influential role in the decision-making process than in other Gulf countries. Since opposition elements swept early parliamentary elections last summer, tensions between the Government and Parliament have increased and resulted in a political stalemate. These tensions have been exacerbated by disputes within the ruling family as younger Shaykhs, most prominently Ahmed Al-Fahd (who heads the GOK's GSD delegation), jockey for position and influence in anticipation of the next succession, which many believe will be sooner rather than later given the Amir's age and health problems. As a result, key legislation has been stalled in Parliament and decisive action on important issues delayed. This is not entirely Parliament's fault. The Government has failed to outline a clear development strategy or to stem rampant corruption (for which Parliament is also to blame). The GOK also remains reluctant to crack down on domestic extremists, fearing this could further fuel domestic tensions.

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LeBaron